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ABSTRACT

In order to assess student perceptions and needs regarding school climate in the newly desegregated Marion County, Indiana, schools in 1983, a questionnaire was administered to a random sample of students. The sample included 10 percent of the white students (residents of the suburban areas in which the schools were located) and 30 percent of the black students (non-residents, who were bused to the suburban schools) attending the desegregated schools. The questionnaire, which had 104 items and a binary (yes-no) response format, addressed the following concerns: student interaction; school environment; teacher/student interaction; school discipline; parental concern for school; and distance/transportation. Response data from 1983 were compared to similar data from the previous school year. Therefore, the chi-square test of significance using planned multiple comparisons, factor analysis, and regression analysis were the statistical procedures employed. Twenty-four separate findings and conclusions resulted. In general, it was found that black and white students interacted well and made friends with each other, although same-race interaction was more frequent. Both groups perceived that their parents and teachers were concerned with their growth; black students, however, felt relatively less "wanted" in their schools. There was less understanding in 1983 than in 1982 regarding why students were transferred for desegregation. Black and white students had similar perceptions regarding self concept, the importance of school, and absence of punishment if their buses were late. Racial differences were noted in responses regarding perceived adequacy of numbers of black teachers, equal treatment by teachers, whether black or white students fought more, parental approval of busing for desegregation, and music played at school. (GC)

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A Study of Student Perceptions and Needs During Year Two of Court Ordered Busing

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INTRODUCTION

Background

This study, the Marion County Student Needs Assessment, was precipated by the January 26, 1981, order of Judge S. Hugh Dillin in the case of United States vs. Board of School Commissioners, Indianapolis, Indiana. The Indianapolis Public Schools had been involved in desegregation litigation since 1968. The final " intradistrict and interdistrict" plan was implemented in the fall of the 1981-1982 school year. The interdistrict remedy involved one way cross district movement of Black students to six suburban Marion County school districts. The district court order called not only for the transfer of 5000 Black students to the suburban school districts, but also for the Indiana State Department of Public Instruction Inservice Plan to be continued as an ongoing program. A major portion of that plan called for a student needs assessment to identify student needs and concerns related to desegregation.

After the 1981 court order, a search was made to locate a study which addressed desegregation related student needs and concerns. However, no appropriate study was found. Most social science research has analyzed only the outcome of desegregation and ignored school and school system characteristics and processes which might affect those outcomes. An assessment committee (i.e., the directors of desegregation from the six suburban school districts along with the state educational consultant in charge of coordinating the inservice plan) was formed to identify student needs and concerns related to desegregation. After extensive observations and interviews of various groups (i.e., student, teachers, administrators, parents and community and political leaders), an approved questionnaire was developed.

The questionnaire was administered to a random sample of students in the six suburban school districts during the spring of 1982.

Upon completion of the 1982 study, the assessment committee decided to revise the questionnaire and administer it during the 1982-83 school year. A research team was selected to analyze the 1983 data in a manner similar to the analysis utilized with the 1982 data. In addition, the study was to compare the 1982 results with the results from the 1983 survey. The purpose of this paper is to present the results of the study of student perceptions and needs during year two of court ordered busing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the student needs assessment was to measure student perceptions in newly desegregated school districts in the area of school climate. It is generally accepted by experts in the field that the goals of school desegregation are improved race relations, minority academic achievement, self-esteem and motivation and ultimately improved minority life chances. The expressed outcome of the study was the development of intervention strategies among educators, students and parents so as to foster the goals of quality integrated education.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The subjects of the study included a random sample of students in grades two through eleven in the six suburban school districts. The sampling included 10% of the White resident students and 30% of the Black non-resident students. The sample was taken from all buildings receiving transfer students within the districts with the attempt to equalize the number of students by race, sex and grade level. The total number of White resident students surveyed was slightly over 3,000 and the total number of Black non-resident students surveyed was approximately 1,500.

Procedures

The questionnaire was administered consistently in all the school districts during the last week of February and the first week of March, 1983. The subjects were told that their thoughts and feelings about desegregation were important. They were also told that there were no right or wrong answers and that it was not a test.

A script was developed and utilized to improve the clarity of instruction and questions for the students at the fifth grade level and below. Both White resident and Black non-resident forms of the questionnaire had 104 items with identical and parallel questions and a binary (Yes and No) response format. The items on the questionnaire addressed the following student concerns: Black and White Student Interaction; Black Student Interaction; White Student Interaction; School Environment; Teacher/Student Interaction; Student/Student Interaction; School Discipline; Parental Concern for School; and Distance/Transportation.

In the construction of the data tape, school district and building identification codes were removed to prevent possible comparison of results across the school districts and in buildings within the school districts. Thus, the study was based on comingled data.

The first step in the analysis was to establish the reliability of the responses to the questionnaire for both years and forms. It was found that the responses to all forms of the questionnaire had relatively high reliability coefficients. This indicated that findings from subsequent analyses could be interpreted in a straight forward manner. The following table provides the established reliability coefficients.

GROUP	N	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficient
1982 White Resident	1,897	99	.89
1982 Black Non-Resident	842	92	.90
1983 White Resident	2,054	104	.88
1983 Black Non-Resident	955	104	.89

In order to prepare the data for the analysis, a filtering procedure was developed by the research team to eliminate cases in which 20% or more of the items had not been answered. The study was only concerned with the perceptions of White resident and Black non-resident students, all others were eliminated. In addition, students enrolled in grade ten in 1982 and grade eleven in 1983 were eliminated from the study due to the fact that no

non-resident students were enrolled in those grades.

Analyses

The assessment committee requested that the 1983 data be analyzed in a manner similar to the 1982 study to insure continuity between the studies and validity in the comparison of the findings from the studies. Therefore, the chi-square test of significance using planned multiple comparisons, factor analysis and regression analysis were the statistical procedures employed.

The 1983 study included a descriptive analysis of each item. For each item, the percent of students responding "yes" to the item was compared by race across the grades. The chi-square test of significance using planned multiple comparisons was utilized to identify significant differences between the responses of White and Black students in grades two through ten. Due to the oversampling of Black students, the White and Black samples were weighted so that the group proportions were representative of the school districts' populations. (Weights: White (1.26); Black (0.5).

The 1982/1983 comparison study also included an item by item analysis. For each item, the percent of students responding "yes" to the item was compared by year across the grades for both White and Black students. The chi-square test of significance using planned multiple comparisons was again utilized to identify significant differences. The 1982 study utilized grades three through nine, thus this limitation was imposed on the 1982/1983 comparison study.

The second type of analyses completed was the factor analysis. Due to the use of a binary response format to the items, it was necessary to

utilize the Exploratory Factor Analysis Program (EFAP). The data was analyzed using EFAP for White and Black students, as well as for both groups individually. In the 1983 study as in the 1982 study, those items that had a factor loading of .4 or higher were considered significant. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on each factor to identify any significant differences between the responses of Black and White students. The eight factors that resulted were labeled Teacher-Student Interaction, Black Student and White Student Interaction, Extra-Curricular Involvement, Feelings Towards School, Understanding Between White Students and Black Students, Parental Attitudes Toward School, Student-Student Interaction; and School Amity. It should be noted that the research team alerted the assessment committee to the limitations of factor analysis as a statistical tool in this study. Due to the precarious nature of the data, if another random sample of students was surveyed using the same questionnaire, the factor analysis might not replicate.

The third type of analyses was the regression analysis which examined the data for relationships between the eight factors defined in the factor analysis. The regression analysis was completed on the data for the combined group - both Black students and White students. Each factor was regressed not only on the other factors, but on three other variables: grade, sex and race. In the analysis of each separate factor, the other seven factors as well as grade, race and sex were considered independent variables. Each independent variable had to have a significance level of .05 or higher to be considered correlated with the specific factor being analyzed.

RESULTS

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The following 24 findings and conclusions were the result of a systematic analysis of the results of the chi-square test of significance and the percent of affirmative responses for each item.

1. Black and White students perceived that their parents and teachers were concerned about their academic and personal growth.
2. The vast majority of Black and White students perceived that they had made friends with students of the opposite race.
3. Black and White students perceived that they had made friends since coming to their school. In addition, they perceived that they had enough time to see their friends during and after school.
4. The vast majority of Black and White students perceived that they had worked harder and learned more this year. Moreover, the perceptions of Black students indicated they felt the work was harder this year than last year.
5. The perceptions of Black and White students indicated less understanding of why students were transferred for desegregation this year compared to last year.
6. Black and White students perceived that there was interaction between students of the opposite race in the halls and at lunch. However, if given the opportunity they interacted more often with students of the same race.
7. Black students perceived less positively than the White students that the teachers wanted them in the suburban schools. However, both groups perceived that the teachers wanted the White students in the suburban schools.

8. White students tended to perceive equal treatment by teachers in a more positive manner than Black students.
9. White students perceived they wanted to be in their school and they wanted to return to the school district next year in a more positive manner than Black students. However, Black and White students perceived more positively this year, that the Black students wanted to be in the suburban schools.
10. White students felt more proud of their school this year than Black students.
11. Black students perceived distance as a factor which precluded, parental and their own involvement in school activities.
12. White students perceived their school less crowded this year than last year.
13. Black and White students perceived that the teachers wanted to be at their school.
14. Black and White students perceived school as important.
15. Student desegregation is perceived to be a facet of school life. Moreover, Black and White students perceived that the Black students will return to the suburban schools next year.
16. Black and White students perceived themselves as having a positive self concept.
17. The vast majority of Black and White students perceived that they were not afraid of students of the opposite race at the beginning of the school year or at the present time.
18. Black students perceived that there were not enough Black teachers in their school. However, 55% of the surveyed White students disagreed.

19. A relatively high percent of Black and White students perceived that school had changed a lot from last year. Although more Black students perceived school was more fun last year, this is a decrease from their percent of affirmative responses in the 1982 study.
20. Although the percent of affirmative responses was moderate, little difference existed between the perceptions of Black and White students as to whether both groups knew as much as the other at the beginning of the school year. It should be noted that this is a positive increase in the percent of affirmative responses for White students over the two year period.
21. Although the percent of affirmative responses tended to be moderate, a large difference existed between the responses of Black and White students as to whether Black or White students fought more. However, White students perceived fewer fights at their school this year than last year.
22. Black students perceived that their parents strongly approved of their going to the suburban schools, while White students perceived that their parents moderately approved of students being transferred to the suburban schools for desegregation.
23. Black and White students perceived they were not punished because their bus was late.
24. A large difference existed between the percent of affirmative responses of Black and White students as to whether they liked the music that was played at their school.

Recommendations

The following recommendations to the school districts emanated from the findings and conclusions.

1. A continuing program of staff and student development needs to be established and maintained in the school districts to ensure that mutual benefits may be derived from contacts among staff, students and parents.
2. An assessment of available multicultural materials in all curricular areas should be developed, implemented and evaluated on an ongoing basis.
3. No parent or student compelled to participate in involuntary busing should be left without a clear understanding of why the court deems such a sacrifice necessary. This is the responsibility of both the school district and the community.
4. The philosophy and practice of the school districts must be reflective of and reinforce those characteristics of academic excellence and equity.
5. The school districts need to continue taking affirmative steps in the recruitment of minorities to assume staff positions.
6. The school districts need continued focus on the development, revision and communication of firm, fair and consistent disciplinary codes and practices.
7. The school districts need to develop and maintain effective accountability procedures for students, parents and educators.

Future Research

In conclusion, the discussion of future research endeavors is appropriate. During the spring of 1984, a random sample of approximately 4,000 students in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 from the six suburban school districts as well as the sending urban school district will participate in a longitudinal study. A 119 item questionnaire utilizing a Likert type response format (Always - Usually - Unsure - Seldom - Never) has been developed by the research team and the school district representatives with items from the 1983 Marion County Student Needs Assessment Instrument, the Rand Corporation's National Longitudinal Study of School Desegregation (student instrument) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory.

The 1984 research design has several advantages over the previous years' design. First, the longitudinal study will allow for the identification of the students from whom data will be collected three times during a two year period. Second, the school districts will be identified, which will allow for individual district analysis and more specific recommendations for intervention or change within the school district. Finally, the data analysis will involve a comparison of the means of the criterion variables for Black students and White students while controlling for socio-economic status (SES), parent involvement and proximity. The improvements in the design of this field based research will assist in bridging the gap between theory and practicse.